

Red Herring Puppets
Study Guide

Hansel and Gretel





ORIGINS OF "HANSEL AND GRETEL"

Many of today's fairy tales have evolved from much older stories that were passed on for generations in different parts of the world. Most historians trace "Hansel and Gretel" back to the Medieval period during the Great Famine when many people were dying of hunger.

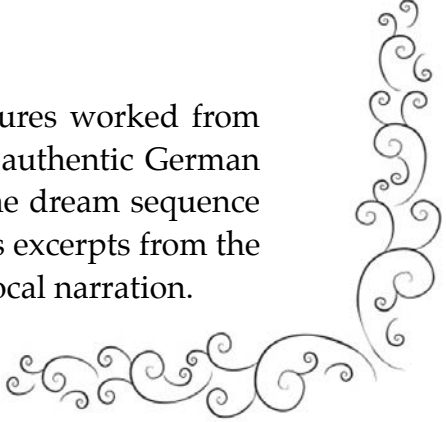
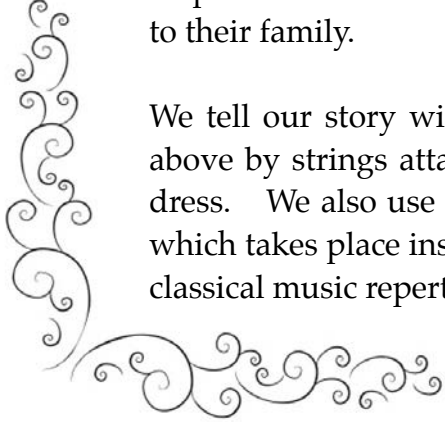
In 1812, Jacob and Ludwig Grimm published a book of stories entitled "Children's and Household Tales." In their innovative collection, Hansel and Gretel's mother was depicted as a selfish, angry, woman who demanded her husband leave the children in the forest to fend for themselves. Their readers were upset and so the brothers Grimm responded by making her a stepmother.

Since then, the story of "Hansel and Gretel" became widely popular and underwent many changes. In 1893, the story was turned into a children's opera by Englebert Humperdinck.

RED HERRING PUPPETS' PRODUCTION

The Red Herring Puppets have drawn from several different sources to create this puppet performance. In our version of the story, the woodcutter and his wife are loving parents who try their best to keep their children safe, despite their poverty. After Hansel carelessly spills the family's milk, their mother sends them into the woods to find berries and mushrooms for dinner. They wander into the forbidden forest, leaving a trail of bread crumbs to find their way home. As darkness falls, they realize that birds have eaten the crumbs. Scared and lost, they huddle together and fall asleep under a tree. They dream of an evil hexe, an old witch who turns children into gingerbread. But they also feel the presence of a guardian angel, watching over them with kindness.

When they awake Hansel and Gretel are seduced by a magical candy house. Hungry, they give in to their temptation and start eating pieces of the house. The owner of the house is an old witch who casts a spell to imprison them. They help each other to be strong and find a way to outwit the cruel witch and return to their family.



We tell our story with traditional marionettes; articulated figures worked from above by strings attached to a control. They are costumed in authentic German dress. We also use traditional shadow puppets to animate the dream sequence which takes place inside the full moon. We selected numerous excerpts from the classical music repertoire, to create mood and punctuate the vocal narration.

WHAT IS A FAIRYTALE

A fairy tale is a short story, typically about ordinary people interacting with magical beings. It is seldom about fairy folk. It usually concerns a person or a family in a time of great stress or difficulty. The hero or heroine is most often the youngest child who is trapped in a difficult situation. The hero often needs to overcome a supernatural force or an evil enchantment. Sometimes the hero has help from an animal or a benevolent supernatural being. The hero succeeds and lives happily ever after.....



IS HANSEL AND GRETEL A FAIRY TALE ?

Answer the questions below to decide if you think the story of "Hansel & Gretel" fits the criteria for a fairytale.

Who is the story about?

What is the difficulty or stress they most overcome?

Is there an element of enchantment or a powerful evil character?

Who is the hero or heroine of the story?

Does the hero or heroine receive any help from an animal or supernatural being?

Is there a happy ending?

Think of three other stories you know that you think are fairytales. Answer the questions above to make sure they fit the criteria.

CREATE YOUR OWN FAIRY TALE

Write an original fairy tale. You can choose from the suggestions below or make up your own characters and situation.

HERO or HEROINE - Poor orphaned child, lonely prince or princess, youngest child in a family, yourself.

SUPERNATURAL BEING (This being could be good or bad.) - Troll, elves, giant, witch, fairy, fairy god mother, guardian angel, mermaid, wizard.

ENCHANTMENT - sleeping spell, transformation (like turning a pumpkin into a carriage or a prince into a frog), a curse over a kingdom (such as lack of rainfall) extreme sadness, a physical change such as growing smaller or larger.

SOME GERMAN WORDS

We use several German words in the telling of our story. We have included their English translations below. See if you can find them in the word search puzzle. The words are hidden vertically, diagonally, horizontally, and backwards.

mutter - mother

vater - father

grossmutter - grandmother

gutenacht - goodnight

bitte - please

nein - no

lebkuchen - gingerbread

kinder - children

hexe - old hag or crone, witch

hexehaus - witch's cottage

bratwurst - a tasty German sausage

H N B Q V J U Y C L R E T T U M Y R
D E P E H X Z C A L T G F K D B B E
U I W H Q E W E G E C Z J M N L R T
N N F E A R X A E P Y X K T Y G E T
H M I X Y E E E M S A D H E N K A U
C Y A E X D E Q H G P R N V R O D M
T W Y D N A C V W A O E N A E E C S
I A A X O I C X R R U D M T C B R S
W I T F H K V T Y W N S G E U W U O
B R A T W U R S T N D P T R S V M R
H S O W L T N E H C U K B E L Q B G
T S E H C E R U S A E R T G E X S H
M V G U T E N A C H T P Y W S X V E
F D X D O O W R U T H E T T I B N M

There are also several English words from the story of Hansel and Gretel that are hidden in the puzzle. See if you can find them.....

candy, wood, spell, treasure chest, cage, witch, bread crumbs, owl

Help
Hansel and Gretel
find their way to the
bird who will lead them
home!

